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EDITORIAL NOTES.

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THE ELECTIVE SYSTEM OF STUDIES AT HARVARD UNIVERSITY

THE recent changes in the method of administering the curriculum at Yale have stirred up interest in the already much-discussed question of the merits of the elective system. The academic discussion of such a question does not go far toward a settlement, and the contestants retire from the encounter each satisfied that he is a broad-minded man and that his opponent is a "wee bit bigoted." A much better test of the efficiency of a system is an investigation into the actual workings of it as evidenced by the courses taken and the work done in a college in which such a system is in force. This was done in Harvard by a number of students in the seminar in the Department of Education under the guidance of Professor Paul H. Hanus, and the results obtained are of peculiar interest.

But before discussing this investigation it is perhaps worth while to explain away the mistaken idea of too many school-men that Harvard is a place where if one gets in he can disport himself intellectually in any way he may choose. Such persons neglect the second word in the phrase, and seem to forget that it is an *elective system*. The choice of the Freshmen is practically limited to certain specified elementary courses comprising only about 20 per cent. of all the courses offered to undergraduates, and it is only after a very thorough investigation and the consent of the Dean that a Freshman may take more than two courses in any one subject. English, and either French or German, must be taken by almost all Freshmen, and the course cards must be approved by the advisers. The whole body of courses is divided into about fourteen examination groups, and no two courses in the same group may be taken at the same time. No more than six courses may be taken at a time.

Now, having cleared away some of the clouds that too often obscure the light when the subject is being discussed, let us consider the investigation. The programs of study of 448 members of the class of 1901 were examined and the results tabulated so as to show as many phases as possible of the workings of the elective system. Of thirty-three subjects offered for choice the first fourteen that were chosen (having regard to the number of students making the choice and also, substantially, to the number of courses taken in each subject) were as follows: English (standing first, even after the prescribed courses are eliminated), History, Economics, German, French, Philosophy, Fine Arts, Chemistry, Latin, Geology, Government, Greek,

Mathematics, and Physics. Arranged according to the average number of courses taken by each student, the first fourteen are English, History, Music, Economics, Engineering, Chemistry, Philosophy, German, French, Architecture, Greek, Fine Arts, Latin and Spanish. Mathematics drops to the nineteenth place, Geology and Government to the twenty-second, Physics to the twentieth-sixth. While relatively few students chose Music, Engineering, and Architecture, each of those students took a large number of courses, and while relatively many took Geology, Government, and Physics, each one took little in each subject.

While this arrangement is interesting and suggestive, it does not set the matter in as clear a light as the succeeding table:

According to the Number of Courses Taken in the Group	According to the Number of Students Taking Courses in the Group	According to the Average Number of Courses Taken per Student
1. Modern Languages	1. Modern Languages	1. Modern Languages
2. History and Political Science	2. History and Political Science	2. History and Political Science
3. Science	3. Science	3. Science
4. The Classics	4. Philosophy and Education	4. The Classics
5. Philosophy and Education	5. Fine Arts and Music	5. Philosophy and Education
6. Fine Arts and Music	6. The Classics	6. Fine Arts and Music
7. Mathematics and Astronomy	7. Mathematics and Astronomy	7. Mathematics and Astronomy

The opponents of the elective system have reiterated the charge that such a system puts a premium upon the evasion of hard work; in other words, the students are on the lookout for "snap" courses. Now, it is difficult to explain what is really meant by this term, but it seems to refer to courses of an introductory nature, and where the lecture method prevails. These courses certainly ought not to be abolished, nor ought they be too few in number. They have a distinctly cultural value, and while the results may not be as tangible as those in a course that has more of the instructional and less of the inspirational, nevertheless the effect upon life and conduct is often immeasurably greater. In this comparison we have in mind the fact that these courses are generally given by older men of ripe experience, whose inspiration and suggestive handling of the subjects looks toward training rather than toward instruction. But even allowing the generally accepted definition of such a course, we find that of the 448 programs there were but twenty that show from six to eight choices (out of a total of about twenty choices) among such courses. Some of these were the programs of men of high rank who graduated with a *magna cum*.

The tendency toward specialization is also one of the points urged against the elective system, and, oddly enough, there are other critics who assert that it results in a dissipation of energy. The investigation into the tendency

toward specialization revealed some interesting facts. But first must come the definition of the term. A student is regarded as specializing who has taken two full courses or more in one department (*i. e.*, Greek, Latin, Mathematics) in one year, or three and one-half full courses or more in one department in two years, or five full courses or more in one department in four years, with not less than one and one-half courses in any one year. This definition was enlarged so as to make comparison easier by enlarging the department to a group, as the Classics, History, Government, and Modern Languages. For this purpose it was decided that a man is regarded as specializing who has taken three full courses or more in one group in one year, five full courses or more in one group in two years, seven full courses or more in one group in three years, eight and one-half full courses or more in one group in four years. Of the four-year men 6 per cent. specialized throughout the four years; 12 per cent. for three years; and 19 per cent. failed to specialize even for one year. There are always men coming from other colleges who already have their degree, but who enter the Senior year that they may obtain the Harvard degree. It is interesting to notice that 75 per cent. of these men specialized during their one year. Nearly one-half of the men who specialized during three and four years did so in English, one-sixth in Modern Languages (except English), and less than one-eighth in the Classics, and also in History and Government. There were some twenty-nine men whose programs might be considered as indicating undue specialization. These represent 7.8 per cent. of the 372 men who did the full work for a diploma at Harvard, and who are, therefore, the ones whose courses ought to be taken into account. Of these twenty-nine, fourteen specialized in History and Political Science, and nine of the fourteen are now studying Law. Ten specialized in History and Modern Languages, of whom two are studying Law, and two are teaching Modern Languages. Three specialized in the Classics, two now being candidates for the doctor's degree, and one studying for the ministry. Of the remaining two, one specialized in Engineering and is now studying Engineering, and one in Psychology and is now studying Medicine. Nine of the twenty-nine were three-year men.

We hear so often the plea that a program of studies should be well balanced, that is, that it should include some work in each of, say, three groups of subjects, Languages, Social Studies, and Science. Having this in mind, Mr. Moore, from whose article in the *Harvard Graduates Magazine* these facts are taken, suggests that a reasonable requirement would be that each of these groups should be represented by at least 15 per cent. of the total work of the student. This would leave 55 per cent. for distribution according to interest, aptitude, or future needs. The programs of the 372 students who completed their work at Harvard show that there was no one who failed to take some work in the Linguistic group, but two who failed to take some work in the Sociological group, and sixteen who failed to take some work in the Scientific group, while three failed to take the minimum of 15 per cent.

in the Linguistic group, twenty-one in the Sociological and one hundred and ninety in the Scientific.

Individual subjects next claimed the investigators' attention, and it is noted that of the 372 who completed at Harvard all the requirements for the degree of A.B., 254 (68 per cent.) took no Physics; 250 (67 per cent.) took no Mathematics; 247 (66 per cent.) took no Greek; 215 (58 per cent.) took no Chemistry; 178 (48 per cent.) took no Latin; 147 (39 per cent.) took no Fine Arts; 140 (37 per cent.) took no Philosophy; 137 (36 per cent.) took neither Greek nor Latin; 87 (23 per cent.) took neither Latin nor Mathematics; 29 (8 per cent.) took no Science of any kind; 8 (2 per cent.) took neither Physics nor Chemistry; 60 (16 per cent.) took no Botany, Zoölogy, Mineralogy, or Hygiene.

Such an investigation as this has a distinct value, and we have used this article in almost all of its details because the information it contains ought to be of interest to the constituency of this journal, and the publication in which it appeared is restricted in its scope, and seldom seen by the man who has not been educated at Harvard. Mr. Moore says that he has data at hand concerning some other colleges, and we hope that he soon will publish some further investigations that will give us additional light of just such a character as this and enable us to debate this question under clearer skies.